

Sign Review in the Harvard Square Conservation District

Signs that conform to the requirements of the base zoning code (Article 7.0, Signs and Illumination) do not require approval at a hearing of the Historical Commission and can be approved administratively by CHC staff.

The Harvard Square Overlay District was amended when the Harvard Square Conservation District was established to transfer jurisdiction to the Historical Commission on the following attributes of sign proposals:

- Number of projecting or free-standing signs per building
- Size of individual wall, freestanding, or projecting signs
- Location of sign in relation to the second-floor window sill height
- Allocation of sign area on various sides of a building or per tenant with property owner's permission
- Illumination of projecting signs

The CHC cannot waive the following zoning regulations:

- total sign area allowed (the area formula in Harvard Square is 1 square foot per linear foot of frontage)
- 20-foot height limit above grade

Signs that exceed these limits must be granted a variance by the Board of Zoning Appeal.

In reviewing signs for appropriateness, the Cambridge Historical Commission, under Chapter 2.78, Article III, has binding jurisdiction over size, materials, dimensions, illumination, and appearance of signs. Content, color, and graphics – the commercial message – are not reviewed by the Historical Commission.

Cambridge Historical Commission

June 12, 2018